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## **Road transformation project seeking assist from Uncle Sam**

Tricia Lynn Silva, Reporter

The city of San Antonio is going after its share of \$300 million that is up for grabs under a grant program under the federal Office of Economic Activity.

That money, city leaders say, could mean the difference between starting the makeover of Harry Wurzbach Road — a prime corridor in to Fort Sam Houston — in 12 months versus 20 years.

The OEA is looking to grant a total of \$300 million worth of awards to projects that would improve the transportation infrastructure around military facilities impacted by the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) decisions.

Fort Sam Houston — which has been repositioned as a center of excellence for trauma care as a result of BRAC — is a prime magnet for some of that grant money.

The city is requesting a total of \$100 million through the OEA program. Of that total, \$68 million would go toward the revitalization of Harry Wurzbach Road, according to former District 10 Councilman John Clamp, one of several city business leaders working to bring some of that OEA money to San Antonio.

The makeover of Harry Wurzbach is crucial to alleviating drainage and traffic problems that have plagued that thoroughfare and surrounding businesses and residential communities for years.

And given the economic revitalization taking shape along surrounding thoroughfares — like Austin Highway — the Harry Wurzbach project is one “that can spur so much more revitalization,” Clamp continues.

Right now, Harry Wurzbach stands as a “long-neglected portal to Fort Sam Houston’s front door,” as Clamp puts it.

Improving that portal, leaders say, is crucial to creating a key point of access in to Fort Sam Houston — and to vital missions like the San Antonio Military Medical Center (also known as BAMC).

“This project has multiple benefits,” explains city engineer Mike Frisbie, who also serves as the director of the office of Capital Improvements Management Services. “Right now, it’s a pretty tired corridor.”

The OEA grants would provide for up to 100 percent of the costs associated with projects like the Harry Wurzbach transformation.

Right now, be it at the local or federal level, “there is no transportation money out there,” says Jesse Hereford of the local office of S&B Infrastructure.-- which has brought its experience in engineering and environmental assessments to the project.

To do this project without federal help, “it would be a long time before this project will be completed,” Clamp says.

The Harry Wurzbach project encompasses some 3.4 miles that stretch from the Loop 410/Harry Wurzbach intersection to Fort Sam.

The project is big enough to need assistance, but small enough that trying to do it in phases would be nearly impossible, say Clamp and Frisbie.

“We look at it as one project, and its a big project for the city to take on,” Frisbie says. “That’s why we’re seeking federal assistance through this grant.”

Proposals are due to the OEA by Oct. 7. Winning projects are slated to be announced in November, Clamp says.

The major goal of the project is to turn Harry Wurzbach into what’s known as a “complete street” — one that accommodates bicyclists, pedestrians, motorists and public transportation users.

When completed, the corridor also would also celebrate the history of Fort Sam, and serve as a fitting entry into the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, Clamp says. In keeping with that mission, Harry Wurzbach has been given a new honorary name: The TAPS Memorial Boulevard.